

News Release
USDA Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
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Effective Immediately

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ENVIRONMENTAL CLEAN UP AT PENA BLANCA LAKE BEGINS **Lake to be Drained, Temporarily Closed to Public**

TUCSON, AZ (September 19, 2008) – An environmental clean up project to remove mercury from Peña Blanca Lake, on the Nogales Ranger District, Coronado National Forest, is scheduled to begin on October 6, 2008. During implementation of the project, the lake and adjacent facilities will be closed to the public.

Mining for various minerals has occurred in the area in the past. Over time, mercury-contaminated sediment from tailings piles of prior gold, silver and lead mines has been washed down drainage channels and deposited into the lake. The Forest Service began the clean up process in 1999 by removing the mine tailings from Peña Blanca Canyon, which eliminated the primary sources of contamination entering the lake. Further restoration activities will include draining the lake, water and sediment sampling, construction of sediment control structures, site clearing and grubbing, and the excavation and removal of sediment to a nearby consolidation cell.

Draining the lake also provides an opportunity to pursue the elimination of undesirable, non-native species currently found there. The bullfrog, predator of native frogs, fish, reptiles and small mammals, is the primary species of concern. The Arizona Game and Fish Department, Coronado National Forest, Sky Island Alliance, University of Arizona, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and others are working together to develop a strategy to eliminate bullfrogs during the project.

Project activities will increase vehicular traffic and require the use of heavy construction equipment. Due to these activities and safety concerns, Arizona State Highway 289 beyond Milepost 10, and Peña Blanca Lake, including the fishing pier, Upper and Lower Thumb Rock Picnic Areas, Red Rock Picnic Area, and Lower White Rock Campground will be closed to the public beginning October 6, 2008, until May 2009, or until further notice. Ruby Road and Upper White Rock Campground will remain open. For further information, please contact Heidi Schewel at (520) 749-7720.